

In studio with Adil Writer

Evelyne Schoenmann

Adil, what is your art background? I have studied and worked as an architect in Bombay and San Francisco; now I am neck deep into ceramics. In 1998, I drove my Bombay Zen into the portals of the haloed Golden Bridge Pottery (GBP) in Pondicherry. What started out as a seven-month course, has turned into a lifelong addiction! I spent two and a half formative years at GBP under the tutelage of Ray Meeker and Deborah

pedestal-based sculptural shows. With acrylics I don't have to deal with the idiosyncrasies of cone ten firings and I get a colour palette that I cannot get in high-fired stoneware. So, one doesn't choose favourites here. Each medium has its place in time. My days I spend at my studio, Mandala Pottery, while my sundowners are with paint, powdered clays and canvases.

don't have a clue what's going on and sit on the fence and judge.

And does it work, the part of "social and spiritual cohesion"?

I think in your question, "work" is what strikes the strongest chord in me. My work is my yoga; it's a cliché.... but it's true. Everything else (hopefully) follows by default. In spite of co-running a production pottery studio, I am blessed to be able to



Smith. Meeker, also an architect-turned-potter, was working on his last fired-house project in those days, and I was lucky to be a part of it. In fact, my international clay journey took off in 2008 when Janet Mansfield invited me to Clay Edge in Gulgong, where I built and fired a three-meter-high dome which still stands tall today at Morning View.

Do you prefer working with clay or paint?

I have painted canvases all my life. When I started showing at galleries, I found it very obvious to add my paintings to blank walls in object-driven,

Tell us about your move to Auroville

One does not simply "move" to Auroville; one partly packs up the past and takes an enormous leap of faith into the future. Established in the early seventies, Auroville is an experiment in social and spiritual cohesion. Located on the southeastern coast of India, it is a micro colony of some three thousand people from over 40 countries, drawn from all walks of life, sharing a common dream; to rise above the grab-what-you-may mentality of the modern age while providing something of lasting value. We often get categorized as hippies! ...or creatures the world forgot, especially by people who

travel the world with my claywork. I am typing this in Tuscany at a wood-firing symposium of the Diagonal Eleven group.

You also make large ceramic murals and installations

Yes.... recently I completed an installation titled Once Were Barcodes. What started as a fascination of working with the aesthetic of a barcode as a symbol, moved on to its deconstruction. This is a set of acrylic-on-canvas, unfired-clay-paintings. Five-metre-long canvases are stretched around two-metre-high free-standing wooden frames, spreading out to over eight metres.

Tell us about your treasure boxes

Boxes are fascinating! What started as an experiment in figuring out the ying from the yang, a study in negative and positive cuts in clay, has turned into an obsession. I quote from an article by Ray Meeker here:

“These boxes are small. Many fit in the palm of the hand. Intentionally. They are made to be held – close to the heart – to be looked at closely and opened. Inside? There is virtually no inside. This is not a box to be filled with pins, buttons and paperclips. A treasured ring? Or the key to the jewellery box? Perhaps. But what does an Adil Writer Treasure Box really hold? Unquestionably, your imagination. And a kind of rite of passage if you wish to

the years I have collected a formidable collection of objects I use as stamps for claywork. Here I use my favourite set... antique metal stamps used in the olden days by priests to brand themselves with specific ikons. I learnt a long, long time ago from Jim Danisch that a clay object needs to have little details and surprises that are not apparent from one angle. And I squarely (and gleefully) blame this teaching for all the detailing I have been doing in my claywork ever since!

This done, the pieces need to dry as a whole; the lid and base attached to each other, so they make their shrinking moves in tandem. I slip these now using a variety of flashing slips or cobalt / iron mixes, keeping the soda firing in mind.

have to say; listen to their stories, examine their scars, and tell them that I am thankful for the grace of working with clay!

Living in Auroville, making art and being so successful with it: are you living the perfect life?

How does one define something so relative? I truly believe I do what I have to do. And am blessed to do this my way. Sure, the demons within will always put out question marks. But then again, without them things would be too easy. At the end of the day, holding a well-made, well fired piece is what makes it all worthwhile; as close to the edge of perfection as we wish to traverse.



Photo - Marco Saroldi, Auroville

make the trip—from outside to inside—to Bachelard’s realm of intimate immensity.”

Would you tell us about the process of making them?

Let’s say, for this article, I was wanting to feature soda-wood fired boxes. So I choose a soda-clay body made with an in-house recipe at Mandala Pottery. I use a simple coiled aluminium wire and bravely cut into a 10 kg bag of clay. Later, I cut the pieces into two, defining the base and the lid. I never tire of opening these and seeing the random result. Next I scoop out the insides. “One scoop each”, I tell myself, “no fiddling”! Over

Depending on various timelines, I fire these raw or bisqued. Ruthanne Tudball turned my life upside down when she introduced me to the magic of soda firings at a workshop in Auroville. There’s been no looking back since. At Mandala, we fire our kiln for nearly 24 hours, using wood as the primary fuel.

I believe the two nights of the kiln’s cooling cycle that I stop worrying about results, I will possibly change my profession! Day 3 after the firing night is a day of giddy surprises, heartbreaks and rewards of beautifully fired treasure boxes that proudly proclaim the kiss of soda. Several days later I listen to what they

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Evelyne Schoenmann’s next interview is with **Curtis Benzle, USA**.

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